

Ofqual Board

Paper 26/14

Date:
23 July 2014

Title:
Chief Executive's Report

Report by:
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Paper for discussion and information

open paper



Summary

1. This report updates the Board on strategy, strategic risks and Government policy developments. It also updates the Board on summer awarding and on other matters of note.

Recommendations

2. The Board is asked:
 - To review and endorse the 2014-17 draft corporate plan;
 - To note the Government's current policy positions;
 - To review and comment on strategic risks and mitigations;
 - To receive an update on summer awarding; and
 - To receive (for comment) the draft annual report to Parliament on standards.

Considerations

Strategy

3. Following earlier Board consideration of the organisation's developing regulatory strategy and other strategic aims and plans, the Board is asked to consider and endorse the Corporate Plan for the period 2014- 2017, attached at appendix one. It reflects the agreed strategies and priorities of the Board.
4. Board members will note that the pace of delivery of the regulatory strategy is dependent on funding for the period covered by the draft plan.
5. Delivery in accordance with the plan is already underway. As the Board is aware, changes to the organisation's operating model are in hand, in order to continue to deliver the Board's strategies over the life of the plan.

Policy

6. Board members will be aware of the 15 July reshuffle. At the time of writing (15 July) we do not expect any significant policy changes from the reshuffle, particularly to the established GQ reform programmes. We have written to new ministers offering briefing on summer awarding and other priorities.

Impending announcements

7. At the time of writing, the Government is due to announce that IGCSEs (officially known as Level 1/Level 2 certificates) in maths and English will not be recognised in performance tables in 2017, when the new GCSEs in those subjects are introduced. IGCSEs in other subjects will similarly be withdrawn from tables as the GCSEs in those subjects are introduced. The Government is developing a process to allow redesigned IGCSEs (and other similar academic qualifications) to count in performance tables in later years if they share certain characteristics with GCSEs, and if they can show that they are at least as demanding when performance standards were set. We will advise DfE on the process for considering such qualifications.
8. Alongside the IGCSE announcement, Government plans to announce that early entries in 2016 in existing GCSEs in maths and English will not count in 2017 performance tables alongside the new GCSEs.
9. We will welcome these announcements, should they happen. Together these changes would remove some serious risks to successful first awarding of the new GCSEs albeit the changes will not be popular with many stakeholders.

Post-16 accountability

10. Since Alison Wolf's report on vocational education in 2011, Government has used performance tables at KS4 (age 16), and more recently at KS5 (16-18), to reduce the number and type of vocational qualifications that are generally available for young people.
11. At KS5, Government (BIS) has branded the two types of vocational qualifications that are recognised, as 'Tech Levels' and 'Applied General' qualifications. More detail about the arrangements is attached at appendix two.
12. Government (BIS) recognises that in the medium term, it is for the regulator to ensure Government and others of the validity of these and other qualifications, but alongside rollout of our regulatory strategy. Government (BIS) has determined to impose more immediate requirements, particularly about assessment and employer endorsement. These requirements are intended to improve Tech Level and Applied General qualifications immediately.
13. We are prioritising regulatory audits of those awarding organisations already awarding (or judged likely to award) these qualifications (see the draft Corporate Plan). Audits will be conducted over the summer period and we will advise Government of emerging findings, should they bring into question the efficacy of the new requirements determined by Government for these qualifications.

Post-16 use of GCSEs

14. The Board will have seen the early July exchange of letters with Matthew Hancock (the then skills Minister) alongside the Government's announcement about its ambitions to increase maths and English attainment among post-16 students. In particular, Government is setting a long-term expectation that post-16 students will, where possible, study for GCSEs in those subjects rather than functional skills or alternative qualifications - though functional skills qualifications will continue to be available as a stepping stone to GCSE. The Minister was interested to see our review of functional skills qualifications due in the autumn and we will provide it to the new Minister.
15. The main focus of the announcement was the additional funding for workforce recruitment and development. The letters (see appendix three) were intended to make sure there was no scope for confusion about the implications for the GCSE, which will not have its purpose or design changed by this announcement.
16. We can expect many post-16 providers to argue for more assessment windows in GCSEs than the currently-planned two (summer and November), but that would be difficult to achieve given the approach we

take to standard-setting in GCSEs. However we have agreed with Government to review future options and implications with exam boards over the coming years (not prior to awarding new GCSEs).

Apprenticeships

17. The Board has previously agreed that we should offer to regulate apprenticeship assessments as part of the new trailblazer arrangements. We made detailed propositions to Government about how we might do this, consistent with the new regulatory strategy. At the time of writing, we had not had a response from the outgoing Minister.
18. We continue in any case to advise Apprenticeship Unit colleagues on assessment issues. We recently, at the request of the then Minister, joined a panel to review and advise him on the apprenticeship standards proposed by the second phase of trailblazers for over fifty job roles.

Further Education Learning Technology Action Group (FELTAG)

19. The Government recently published its response to the report of the Further Education Learning Technology Action Group, which made recommendations earlier in the year to improve the use of ICT in further education, including in assessment. We had limited discussions with Government about the issues before publication of their response and the recommendations do not cause us significant concern: they do not impose a blanket requirement or target for e-assessment, which would almost inevitably lead (currently) to a lack of validity. We continue to monitor developments in this area.

Grading Vocational Qualifications

20. Following the Board's advice to Government (BIS) on grading qualifications, we exchanged letters with Minister Hancock (see appendix four). We will continue to discuss options with Government.

Strategic Risks

21. As we implement changes to our regulatory strategy and to the way we are organised alongside continued reform of general qualifications, and as the summer series awarding is well underway, so our risk profile has changed.
22. Board members are asked to review and comment on the updated strategic risk register attached at appendix five.

Summer Awarding

23. Summer 2014 awarding is now underway. As in 2013, we have met with each of the GCSE/A level boards and CIE to discuss qualifications' standards risks. We are now reviewing awarding data daily as part of our regular data exchange process. We will meet with exam boards on 29

July to review A level outcomes and on 4 August to review GCSE outcomes. We will review IGCSE outcomes for CIE separately.

24. We published an open letter to schools and colleges on 26 June <http://ofqual.gov.uk/news/summer-2014-open-letter-schools-colleges/>.

25. Board members will be updated on the summer series at the Board meeting.

Annual Report to Parliament on Standards

26. A first draft of the report will be presented to Board members at the meeting, for take away and comment. We aim to publish the final report in September and to publish such reports annually in the autumn (following summer awarding).

Research

27. With the arrival of a new Director of Research and Evaluation and a new Deputy Director of Research and Analysis and appointments to two new positions (Standards Chair and Research Chair) our research priorities and plans are being reviewed with the Board's strategic objectives in mind.

28. A strand of the research programme is devoted to marking quality. Studies of mark scheme design are now in train for the autumn and analysis of potential quality of marking metrics has begun. Our review of EARs and Appeals is almost complete: we have met with exam boards to discuss our proposals for a more simple, transparent and effective system.

29. We are completing the first phase of our work on inter-subject comparability which we plan to publish in the early autumn. This will be followed by a study of the impact of various methods of 'alignment' on standards.

30. A study of the comparative demand of international and national maths assessments at GCSE level is also on-going. We will report by the year end - with the aim of sharing best international practice and a better understanding of the comparative demand of England's GCSE maths qualifications.

31. We will be publishing our report on the A/A* relationship in modern foreign language A levels prior to results day in August. The report will include recommendations for better question paper and mark scheme design to improve the reliability and validity of these assessments. We anticipate these improvements will be brought into effect for assessments in summer 2015.

Future Look

32. Considering GCSE, AS and A level specifications remains a priority, alongside oversight of summer awarding.
33. We will be rolling out our new audit approach over the summer and will be able to report to the Board at its next meeting.
34. Consultations continue: Guided Learning Hours (GLH), Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) and Regulatory Strategy consultations will be launched shortly.
35. Recruitment to key positions in the organisation is underway and will be a priority, alongside the further development of our people strategies and funding discussions with DfE and BIS.
36. We will publish shortly our Annual Market Report. Board members are asked to consider the detail in the report, ahead of the September Board awayday.
37. The forward planner for the Board is included at appendix six.

Finances and Resources

38. The financial implications of our planning are set out in the draft Corporate Plan. We are able to flex audit work, using a prioritised 'risk and random' approach, but we must do sufficient to make material improvements within an acceptable timeframe. Funding discussions will be material.
39. A sizeable proportion of the organisation's resources remains dedicated to accreditation.
40. Should the Government determine that IGCSEs are to remain in performance tables, the Board will wish to review its approach to regulating those qualifications. Should they be excluded, it will wish to consider the resource priority to be given to regulating for new alternatives.

Impact Analysis

Internal stakeholders

41. Staff have been involved in considering strategic priorities and have the opportunity to comment on draft plans. For some, our plans drive significant changes in their day to day work.

External stakeholders

42. External stakeholders generally have the opportunity to comment on and influence our plans through formal consultation. Awarding organisations

- are particularly affected and we have taken the opportunity at recent AO events to begin the necessary dialogue, ahead of consultation.
43. We have approached new ministers to discuss theirs and our priorities and plans.
 44. Media, representative groups and schools have been briefed on the main (known) changes likely to affect the pattern of summer series results this year.

Paper to be published	YES
Publication date (if relevant)	After the meeting